

AN

A N S W E R

TO ALL THE

EXCUSES AND PRETENCES

MUCH MEN ORDINARILY MAKE FOR THEIR NOT
COMING TO THE

HOLY COMMUNION.

To which is added,

Brief Account of the END and DESIGN of the
HOLY COMMUNION, the OBLIGATION to receive
it, the WAY to prepare for it,

THE BEHAVIOUR OF OURSELVES BOTH AT
AND AFTER IT.

PRAYERS and MEDITATIONS suitable to the
Occasion.

ed for the meanest CAPACITIES, and very proper
be given away by such as are charitably inclined.

BY THE MOST REVEREND

DR. EDWARD SYNGE,

LATE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF TUAM, IN IRELAND.

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ANSWER to all the EXCUSES and
PRETENCES which Men ordinarily
make for their not coming to the
HOLY COMMUNION.

CERTAIN Man made a great Supper, and bade many; and sent his Servant at Supper-time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one Consent went their ways, every man to his own business, &c. TO MAKE EXCUSE, Luke xiv. 16, &c.

The Design of this Parable is, to represent the Manner of God's Dealing with the People of the World, upon their rejecting the Faith of Christ, and refusing to embrace the Gospel. The Apostles of Christ, who were the Servants of God, were sent by him, commanded, in the first Place, to preach the Tidings of the Gospel to them, and to invite them to come and partake of that Blessing and Happiness, which was offered them by God, through Faith in, and Obedience unto, his Son Jesus Christ. But they, generally, having their hearts wholly, in a Manner, addicted to the Love of this World, had no Inclination to receive so noble and spiritual an Institution, and did not only themselves reject it, but also persecuted others for professing the Christian Profession; despising and trampling under Foot the Son of God; and counting the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith they should have been sanctified, an unholy Thing: And, even despite unto the Spirit of Grace, which would

have wrought upon their Hearts, in order to the Conversion. As therefore the Man in this Parable who made the Supper, was offended with those who did not come when they were invited, and therefore wholly excluded them from his Table; and sent his Servants to call others in their Room (as you may find it in the latter Part of it) so did Almighty God cast off the People of the *Judaïsm*, upon their obstinate rejecting of *Jesus Christ*; giving them up to be destroyed and scattered by the Power of the *Romans*; and commanded the Apostles to go out into all Parts of the World, to gather a Church and a peculiar People unto him free among the *Gentiles*. But my present Aim, in reflecting upon this Parable, lies clear another Way, namely, to represent and reprove these *Excuses* and *Pretences*, which so many Men do make for the gross Neglect of the *Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ*, notwithstanding that God, by the Mouth of his Ministers, does so frequently call and earnestly invite them thereunto. And indeed the Matter is in so lively a Manner represented in the whole Design of it, that I think it is scarce possible to draw a more exact Parallel.

For here, in the first Place, we have Almighty God making a Supper for us, for the feeding and nourishing our Souls in Virtue and Piety through the Passion and Death of our Saviour *Christ Jesus*, which he has appointed for ever to be comminorated, by our eating of this Bread and drinking of this Cup, in Remembrance of him. To this Supper we are not once only, often bidden, by the frequent Admonitions and Exhortations of God's Ministers addressed unto us, that we should come and be Partakers of the *Holy Communion*; and as the Guests, who were

invited in this Parable, had framed some weak and impertinent Excuses for their not coming; one had bought a Piece of Ground, another five Yoke of Oxen, and a third had married a Wife, none of which Things needed to have hindered them from accepting of the good Man's Kindness; just so we, then, from Month to Month, and from Year to Year, we continually turn our Backs upon God's Holy Table, have we yet some Sort of Pretences, wherewith we endeavour to satisfy our Consciences, and to excuse this gross and scandalous Neglect, of which we are guilty.

That our Saviour *Jesus Christ* died for our Sins; that it is only for the Sake of his Merits and Sufferings, that we can hope for Pardon and eternal Life at the Hand of God; that, before his Death, he left this Command with all that should be called by his Name, that they should eat of this Bread, and drink of this Cup, in Remembrance of him, whereby we are obliged to shew forth his Death until his second Coming; and, lastly, that this Ordinance is the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ; or, in other Terms, the Means whereby we do communicate in the Benefits of that Sacrifice which Christ offered, and in the Merits of that Death and Passion which he underwent in his Body, and by the shedding of his Blood for us; and consequently, that the receiving hereof, duly performed, is not only our Duty, but also a great Advantage and Benefit unto us: All these Things, I say, are so universally owned by all who profess Christianity, that I need not offer any Thing for the Proof of them, or any Part of them. But then, surely, one would think that when Men, who are thus persuaded, do so often, and for so long a Time, absent themselves from

this Ordinance, there must be some insuperable Difficulties and Obstacles in the Way, which are beyond their Strength and Power to remove; or else that they would never, at the same Time, both neglect their Duty, and forego their Interest. And I doubt not but to make it appear, as plainly as a Thing can be, that there is nothing which we can at any Time pretend as a Hindrance of our coming to the Holy Communion, but what is either real or ought to be, no Hindrance at all; or else is such as is in our Power, by that Grace and Assistance which God never denies to those who seek it, who will remove and put out of the Way.

To come to the Matter then, and that I may proceed in an orderly Method, I shall reduce the Impediments, which Men do ever alledge for their not coming unto the Holy Communion, these five Heads; that is to say, either *Firstly*, That they are Sinners, and therefore dare not come; *Secondly*, That they are so continually engaged as to be taken up with Business, that they have not Time to prepare themselves for it; or, *Thirdly*, That when they do endeavour to prepare themselves, they find that they cannot do it as it ought to be done; or, *Fourthly*, That having formerly received the Communion they find themselves never the better for it, and therefore think it to no Purpose to come again; or, *Lastily*, That they are not well satisfied with the Manner of celebrating, administering, and receiving this Ordinance in our Church; and therefore cannot join with our Congregation in it: Now is there, I think, any Thing that can be urged as a Way of Excuse for not coming to the Holy Communion, but what I shall fairly examine, and hope, effectually confute, under some one or other of these Particulars.

First, then, some Men may say, That they are great Sinners, and therefore upon that Account are not come to the Holy Communion, for fear that they should be unworthy Receivers, and so, instead of obtaining any Benefit thereby, should only eat and drink their own Damnation:

To this I answer, That if a Man lies under the Guilt of any Sin, and does not repent of it; and heartily resolve to forsake and amend it; it is indeed a Presumption, and a Sin for such a Person, whilst he continues in that State, to come to the Communion. But then I must tell him also, that not only his coming to the Holy Communion, but even his very Prayers, are an *Abomination* to God, *Prov. xxviii. 9.* For what is it else, but a perfect Affront, and even a Mocking of the Divine Majesty, for a Man to make a Shew of Worship and Honour to him, whilst at the same Time he goes on in wilful Disobedience to his known Commands: which were well and seriously considered by those Men, who make no Scruple of addressing themselves to God in Prayer, whilst, by Reason of their Sins, of which they have not repented, they dare not approach unto his Holy Table.

But whatever Sins a Man has been guilty of in Times past, if he truly repents of them, and heartily forsakes them for the Time to come, God has so often, and so plainly promised, in this Case, to grant a full and free Pardon of them, that they cannot justly be pretended as any Obstacle, which should hinder us from approaching to him in any of his Ordinances.

Since then it is in the Power of every Man (at least of every one, who, by a long Course of Wickedness, has not provoked God wholly to withdraw his Grace from him) by that Grace

and Assistance, which God continually offers us, to repent of his Sins, and amend his Life such a Man looks upon his Sins, as a Bar between him and the Holy Communion; yet it is plain such a Bar as it is in his Power to remove, therefore can never justly be pleaded as an Excuse in his Behalf.

But some Man perhaps may say, that though he should beg God's Pardon for his Sins past, and sincerely resolve to forsake them, yet he fears that being frail, he may, some Time or other, be prevailed on, by his own Weakness, or the Strength of a Temptation, to break those Resolutions which he made, and return again to his Sins; and if even this should be the Case with him, he doubts whether God will ever again admit him to Pardon and Reconciliation; and therefore he thinks it safer to abstain from the Holy Communion, rather than run the Hazard of being for ever excluded from the Hopes of Heaven.

In Answer to this I shall offer these three Things,

First, Although a Man does plainly foresee that hereafter he shall be most likely sometimes fall into some Sins of Frailty and Infirmity (such as a hasty Word, or a sudden or unadvised Action) yet this ought not to hinder him from coming to the Holy Communion; for as St. James tells us, *that in many Things we offend all*, James iii. so there is not any Man upon the Face of the Earth, who can be absolutely sure, that he shall always hereafter keep himself free from all Manner of Sin whatsoever. On the contrary, there is no Man but what has his Share, more or less, of human Infirmities, so it is most reasonable to conclude, that in the Course of his Life, the

will sometimes unavoidably surprize and betray us into some Sins. Against these our Infirmities, therefore, we must continually strive, and we may reasonably hope, that, by God's Grace, and our own diligent and careful Endeavours, we may every day more and more prevail against them. But if this were a good Reason for abstaining from the Holy Communion, because a Man cannot at once get a full and perfect Victory over them, I cannot see how even the best of Men (who cannot pretend to absolute Perfection) could safely venture to partake of it; and consequently this would be the Way wholly to lay aside, and abolish the very Ordinance itself.

Secondly, But as for wilful and deliberate Sins; returning again into an habitual Course of Wickedness, there is no Man but, by the Grace of God and his own Endeavours, may, if he pleases, for ever secure himself against it. For however God may think fit, for our great Humility, and farther Trial of us, to leave us still exposed to some of the common Infirmities of our Nature, yet in respect of all habitual or deliberate Sins, we may assure ourselves, that he is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able; but will with the Temptation also make a Way to escape, that we may (if it be not our own Fault) be able to bear it, 1 Cor. x. 13. Nor will he fail to draw nigh to us, whilst we continue careful to draw nigh unto him, James iv. 8. Let us then but steadily resolve, that we will be hearty and industrious in doing what lies in our own Power; and we need not be discouraged by any such Fears as these, as long as we are secure, that God will never let us want his Assistance.

But, *Thirdly*, Let us put the Case as bad as may be; That after a serious repentance, and most steadfast Resolutions of Amendment, ratified and confirmed by the Reception of the Holy Communion, a Man should be so far prevailed upon by the Temptations of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, as to return again to his former Wickedness, in as high, or higher Degree than before; yet, even in this Case, we cannot conclude, that such a Person is for ever excluded by God from Possibility of Pardon and Reconciliation: There are indeed some Passages of Scripture, that do present the Condition of such an one to be very dreadful and dangerous; as *Heb.* vi. 4, 5, 6. *Chap.* x. 26, 27. *2 Pet.* ii. 20, 21. But if, on the other Side, we consider how often, and how highly the Mercy of God is set forth and magnified, even towards the greatest Sinners, upon the true Repentance; that *he hath no Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked*, but that the Wicked turn from his Way and live, *Ezek.* xxxiii. 11. that he is loth to suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance, *2 Pet.* iii. 9. that though our Sins be as Scarlet, or as red Crimson, yet God is ready, upon our Repentance to make them as white as Wool, or Snow, *Isa.* 1:18. From these, and many such Passages of Scripture, I think we may well gather, that if a most profligate and relapsed Sinner does, even after a long Time, come at last to such a Sense of his own Condition, as thoroughly to turn from Wickedness that he hath committed, and to live the Remainder of his Days in the Practice of Virtue and good Works; doing that which is lawful and right, and notwithstanding all his Failures, yet at last continues and perseveres therein; that even

as much a Man as this shall save his Soul alive, Ezek. viii. 27. Although at the same Time it stands with a great deal of Reason, that the greater a Man's Sins have been, and the oftener he has renounced them, the deeper his Sorrow, and the more laborious his Repentance must be, in order to obtain his Pardon. But since a Possibility of Pardon there is, even in this Case itself, we must not make the contrary Fear a Pretence for keeping ourselves back from any of the Ordinances of God, and from a more immediate and intimate Communion with him.

And thus much for the first Impediment.

But, Secondly, some Men pretend, that they are continually engaged, and taken up with Business, so that they have no Time to prepare themselves for the Holy Communion, and therefore do not come to it.

To such Men as these I answer, that this Business, which they pretend, is either lawful Business, or unlawful; if it be unlawful Business, and such as cannot be followed with a good Conscience, it must be renounced, and wholly laid aside; and to lead this as a Reason for not coming to the Holy Communion, is altogether to aggravate, instead of to excuse our Neglect: But if the Business be itself lawful, and followed in a lawful Way, if it neither contains, nor engages us in any Thing which is dishonest, or any Way contrary to the Law of God; such Business as this is so far from unqualifying a Man, that it really rather renders him the more fit to receive the Holy Communion. For as Idleness is itself a Sin, and the Mother, or at least the Nurse of all Manner of Wickedness, so honest and lawful Busines is a Duty which every Man is obliged to be diligent in, 1 Thess. iv. 11.

Eph. iv. 28. And certainly the Performance of Man's Duty will never render him the less acceptable to God, or unfit to draw near unto him in this or any other of his Ordinances.

But there is one particular Sort of Business, which some Men think that whilst they are engaged in it, they cannot be well prepared for the Holy Communion, and that is a Law-Suit. But to this it is very fame Answer must be given that is already turned to the Pretence of Business in general. If a Man engages in a Suit of Law, with a Design to wrong or defraud another ; if, in the Management of it, he has recourse to any base and wicked Art or Contrivances ; if, not contented fairly to try the Merits of the Cause, he strives, by all the Ways he can, to cast personal Reflections upon his Adversary ; or, in a Word, if he herein proceeds in such a Way as is contrary either to Justice or Charity, such a Law-Suit as this, I confess, renders a Man altogether unfit to approach unto God in any Way whatsoever ; not only whilst he is engaged in it ; but also until he has made Restitution and Satisfaction, to the best of his Power, for all the Wrong that he has thereby done unto his Neighbour. But then, why will any Man, who pretends to Christianity, engage in such a Matter as this, which is contrary to common Honesty and a good Conscience ? Or, if unadvisedly he has engaged himself before he knew what he did ; why does he not withdraw, and forbear to prosecute an unjust Cause, or a just one in an unjust Way ? Why does he not make Satisfaction to his Neighbour, if he has done him any Wrong ? And how can he think to plead that as an Excuse for not coming to God's Holy Table, which it is in his Power to lay aside, and to remedy whenever he pleases ?

But

But, on the other Side, if he designs no more than fairly to make use of the Law of the Land, and the Power of the Magistrate (who is ordained of God,) either to defend or recover, what in Conscience he is verily persuaded is his just and lawful Right; if in the Management of his Business he proceeds honestly, and without any Fraud or Juggle; and lastly, if he bears no Malice, nor offers any Way to vent his Spleen against the Person of his Adversary, but is always free and ready to do him any reasonable Office of Kindness or friendship; in such a Law-Suit as this, there is nothing which is contrary to the Duty of a Christian, nor consequently any Thing, which needs to be in the least a Hindrance to his coming to the Holy Communion.

But some perhaps will say, that although there is nothing sinful or unlawful either in the Business they are about, or in their Way of managing or following it; yet their Time is so wholly taken up hereby, that they have not Leisure for the Performance of those solemn and particular Devotions, which are necessary, in order for their due Preparation. Nay, such may be the Condition of some that have not, it may be, so much as a Place of Retirement for their private Devotions (which may be the Case of many Servants and private Soldiers, and such like) and how can they prepare themselves as they ought, or how shall they venture to come, if they are not so prepared?

To this I answer, That it is a Mistake, which some well-meaning Men have entertained, that they think they must not venture to receive the Holy Communion, except they say so many Prayers, and spend so many Hours in Retirement and Meditation for some Days immediately before the

the Celebration of it. Where a Man indeed at his own Command, and Master of his Time, he is much to be approved of, and commended, if, upon such an Occasion as this, spends more Hours than at other Times, in private Prayers, Reading, and Meditation, that may trim his Lamp, before he goes to meet Bridegroom, and cleanse and adorn his Wedding Garment, before he comes to the Marriage Feast. But where the public Service of a Man's Country or the private Necessities of himself or his Family do engage him in so much Business, as that he has not such Leisure for Retirement; if in the Midst of his Affairs he ever takes Care to have God in his Thoughts, and often to lift up his Heart to him by private Ejaculations; and when he has neither Chamber nor Closet, Garden or Field to withdraw himself into, if he but seriously retires into his own Thoughts, (which a Man may do in any Place, upon his Bed at Midnight, and even in the Midst of the greatest Crowd in the Day-time) and there enquires into his past Sins, and renewes his Resolutions of Amendment; and if all this proceeds from an honest and well-meaning Heart, truly and affectionately disposed to the Service of God, and to the Practice of Piety; no doubt but it shall be as well accepted of God, as the most solemn Devotions of those, who have better Opportunity of such Performances.

And thus much for the second Impediment.

Thirdly, Some pretend, that when they do endeavour to prepare themselves for the Holy Communion, they find they cannot do it as it ought to be done; and therefore they do not come. To the several Scruples of which Sort of Men, I shall return brief and distinct Answers.

indeed some then do apprehend, that they are not fit to come, because they are ignorant, and not well informed and instructed in the Principles of Religion.

To this I answer, That indeed, if a Man be ignorant of those Things, which are ordinarily necessary to the Salvation of every *Christian*, it is evidently not fit that he should come to the Holy Communion, until such Time as he be better instructed. But such Instructions as this is so easy to had (at least among us) that it must be every man's Fault, if he wants it. For how easy is for every Man, who either reads the Scripture, hears it read and expounded in our Congregations, sufficiently to learn all the great and necessary Things of the *Christian* Religion? As for Example, That God created all Things; that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that he came into the World, and took our Nature upon him, to suffer for our Redemption; that after he had suffered, he arose again from the Dead, and ascended into Heaven, where he remains for ever in the Glory and Majesty of God, making eternal Intercession for us; and that he shall come again at the end of the World, to judge both the Living and the Dead (who shall at that Time be raised again) and to sentence every man either to everlasting Happiness, or eternal Misery; that every *Christian* is to be admitted into the Church by Baptism; that it is his Duty to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present World; and that it is by the Assistance of the Holy Ghost, who is the Giver of spiritual Life unto us, that we are alone enabled to perform these Duties; and lastly, that in Remembrance of the Death and Passion of our Saviour Jesus Christ, we are commanded to eat of that

that Bread and drink of that Cup, which he has in appointed, and which is the Communion of his Body and Blood; that is to say, the Means whereby we do communicate in the Benefits of the Sacrifice which he offered, and in the Merits of his Passion which he underwent in his Body, and by the shedding of his Blood for our Sakes, as I have already said; all this, I say, is so easy to be learned and understood, that it is a great Shame for any one, who lives in a Christian Country, to be ignorant, and want of any Part of it. And he, who is thus instructed in his Religion, and endeavours, according to his Ability, to increase his Knowledge of divine Things, and hereunto adds the honest and sincere Practice of what he understands, need never fear, that God will reject him for Want of more Knowledge. For although we must, according to our Capacity, add to our Virtue Knowledge yet it is not Abundance of Knowledge, but much Honesty, Charity, and true Piety, that renders us acceptable and pleasing to God. See *I Cor. i. 19* to the seventh Verse of the second Chapter.

Again, some do find their Faith to be weak and wavering, and perplexed with Doubts and Scruples in Matters of Religion; and therefore are afraid to come.

To this I answer, That indeed the stronger and firmer a Man's Faith is, so much the better; and we ought to endeavour as much as in us lies, that our Faith may be ever built on sure and solid Principles, as well for our own Comfort and Satisfaction, as that we may be better able, upon Occasion, to give an Answer to every one who shall ask us the Reason of the Hope that is in us, *I Pet. iii. 15*. But when a Man has done what he can to strengthen and confirm his Faith, if it still con-

he ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ infirm and weak; yet if he be honest and
of his ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ in his Life and Practice, he is nevertheless
where ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ acceptable to God for the Weakness of his Faith:
the ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ for the Strength of Faith is not a Thing in our
of his ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ Power, and therefore not so much a Duty in us,
and ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ a Reward which God is pleased to bestow, in such
Measure as he thinks fit, upon those who are
learned ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ sincere and diligent in his Service; and *he that is*
~~or an~~ ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ *weak in the Faith, may yet be a very good Christian,*
~~igno-~~ ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ *and fit to be received into the Church of*
~~us fa-~~ ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ *Christ, although he be not qualified for doubtful*
~~ccord-~~ ~~is~~ ~~comes~~ *Disputations, Rom. xvi. 1.* As long as a Tree
~~edge~~ ~~continues~~ ~~to bring forth Plenty of Fruit, we are~~
~~st an-~~ ~~sure it is alive, nor do we presently cut it down,~~
~~need~~ ~~and cast it into the Fire, because it is not alto-~~
~~er so well fixed at the Root; and therefore it~~
~~cord~~ ~~may be subject to be shaken by the violence of~~
~~the Wind; and the weakest Faith, if it produces~~
~~much~~ ~~Abundance of good Works, shall be accepted by~~
~~rs u-~~ ~~God; when the strongest Faith, if barren and un-~~
~~. 19~~ ~~fruitful, shall be rejected, and set at nought by~~
~~him. See James ii. 14, &c.~~ Whenever, there-
~~and~~ ~~ore, an honest and well disposed Man finds his~~
~~ouple~~ ~~faith to be any Way weak and wavering, let him~~
~~frai-~~ ~~take up the good Man's Speech in the Gospel,~~
~~Lord, I believe, help thou my Unbelief. Mark ix.~~
~~and~~ ~~24. And let him never fear but that God, who~~
~~and~~ ~~is infinitely gracious and merciful, will accept of~~
~~that~~ ~~him.~~

Some again are afraid, that they do not love God as well as they ought; and the Reason of this Fear is, because they do not find in themselves such warm and affectionate Motions of their Minds towards him, as they apprehend to be suitable to his infinite Excellency and Goodness. And for this Reason they dare not venture to come.

To

To this I answer, That indeed the more ardent and affectionate our Love to God is, so much better is that, as well as our Faith, for being strong and unshaken; but as our Faith is to be judged by its Fruitfulness, rather than its Firmness (as we have just now shewn) so the Holy Scripture teach us, That the *Love of God* consists altogether *keeping his Commandments*, 1 John v. 3.

Some People are naturally of such a Temper, more easily to be moved with a passionate Affection towards those they love, than others are; and yet others, who do not find such warm Motions within themselves, may be as ready and willing as they, to do Acts of Kindness where they profess a Friendship. Nor is the Love of the latter Sort ever the less to be valued, because it appears to be seated and fixed more in the Judgment and Will, which are subject to less Alteration than the Affections; as the true Love of a Wife to her Husband, is to be measured by her Readiness to obey and please him in all Things, much rather than by the Fondness which she expresses to his Person. If therefore a Man finds himself steadfastly resolved *with full Purpose of Heart to cleave unto God*, and, upon all Occasions, to do what commands, ever preferring the pleasing of his Master before any, or all the Honours, Profits, or Pleasures of this World, he may assure himself, that he is a real and true Lover of God; nor need he absent himself from the Holy Communion, for Want of that Ardenity and Liveliness of Affection to God, which the very best of Men perhaps oftener wish for than enjoy, or find within themselves.

Others there are, who fear they are not perfect Charity with all the World: They have

somewhat

sometimes had to do with Men of base and unjust Dealing, who have broken their Promises, and, may be, their Oaths, and thereby betrayed them who have depended on them; or have otherwise been guilty of wicked and unworthy Practices. And although, in Obedience to God's Commands, they would not do any Thing by Way of Revenge, even against these very Men, yet as men as they see them, or do but think of them, they find their very Blood to rise against them, and cannot possibly suppress that Anger and Indignation, which springs up in their Minds against such Persons, and therefore they fear that their Charity is defective, and so dare not come to the Holy Communion.

To this I answer, That our Charity towards man, as well as our Love to God, is to be measured by the Purposes and Resolutions of our Will, and by our Actions consequent thereto, and not by the sudden Motions of our Passions and Affections, which in the Case above-mentioned, may be scarcely so much in our Power, as wholly to be conquered and stifled by us. But whatever passionate Resentments may force themselves into our Minds upon such Occasions as these, if we do not offer them to break out into bitter and reproachful Expressions, or malicious and revengeful Actions, and if, in Spite of our Anger, we do firmly resolve, in Obedience to God's Commands, to return Good, and not Evil for Evil: In a Word, as St. Paul directs us, when we are *angry*, we take Care, and watch ourselves, that we *sin not*, Eph. iv. 26. (which is certainly in our Power, through the Grace of God, and our own Endeavours) we need not fear that any such inward Motions of our Passions, as we cannot wholly suppress,

suppress, but yet do not suffer to break out into sinful Words or Actions, shall ever be imputed us as a Breach of Charity.

Others, again, are afraid, that they are not sorrowful enough for the Sins which they have committed, because they do not find their Grief quick and pungent as they think it ought to be, strong enough even so much as to bring a Tear from their Eyes; and therefore they dare not venture to come.

To this I answer, That true it is, indeed, that we can never grieve too much for our Sins, when we have offended our good and gracious God; if even *Rivers of Tears* could run down our Eyes on this Occasion, they would all be but little enough. But yet, after all, our Sorrow for Sin is not to be measured by the Passionateness of it, which is soon over, or the Tears it produces, which are soon dried up; but is altogether to be estimated by the Amendment which it causes in our Lives. It is a never-failing Rule which St. Paul gives us to know *godly Sorrow* by, which is, that it worketh *Repentance*, 2 Cor. vii. 10. If then a Man has a true and serious Sense of his Sins, as that it brings him to Repentance, that is to say, to a thorough and lasting Reformation of his Life, this Sorrow though it never affects him in a passionate Way or draws any Tears at all from his Eyes, yet it is certainly true godly Sorrow; and such as shall be accepted by God, because it worketh Repentance which is the only End for which godly Sorrow either required or valued.

Others, yet again, there are, who complain that, when they would set themselves to prepare for the Holy Communion, they in a little Time grow so tired with the Length of these Devotions,

which

which are hereunto required, that they are not
able to accomplish what they proposed. And
then they would even force themselves to con-
tinue their Prayers and Meditations, they cannot,
with all their Care, keep their Minds fixed and
attentive upon what they are about; but their
thoughts will unavoidably wander upon other
things that are idle and impertinent. And this
they apprehend to be the Sin of *drawing near to
God with their Mouths, and honouring him with their
Mouths when their Hearts are far from him*, Isa. xxix.
and therefore they dare not come unto his Holy
Table.

To this I answer, That whenever we address
ourselves unto God in Prayer, we ought certainly
use our utmost Endeavours so to fix and com-
mingle our Minds, as that our Thoughts may not
wander, and go astray, if we can possibly hinder
them.

And he who pretends to pray with his Lips, and
does not withal strive that his Heart and Mind
may be devoutly affected, is undoubtedly guilty
of a great Slight put upon the Majesty of God;
and may justly be taxed with some Part of that
in which I but just now made mention of. But
when a Man has done the best he can to fix his
Thoughts, and to keep his Mind from wandering
from Prayer; if after all this, idle and impertinent
imaginings do, against his Will, croud them-
selves upon him; and, like Flies, though continually
beaten off, yet still return again and molest him:
in this Case he may well assure himself, that God,
who is gracious and merciful, will never impute
that to him as a Sin, which, by all his Endea-
vours, he cannot help; but it shall only be reckoned
upon the Score of his Infirmities, against which,
indeed,

indeed, he must ever strive ; but it may be, shall never be able wholly to conquer them as long as he lives.

But there is one Piece of Advice, which I think very proper to offer unto those that are in the Circumstances ; which is, that they should comprise their private Devotions in as few Words conveniently they can ; and then they will neither be so apt to be tired, nor their Thoughts to wander therein, as when they are drawn out to greater Length. It is not much speaking that makes our Prayers the more acceptable to God, or the sooner heard by him, *Matt. vi. 7.* And it is easie to comprehend all that is extraordinarily necessary to be said in Prayer, in a few Words. The Lord's Prayer is but short, and yet very full ; and certainly a Form most acceptable to God. The Publican *God be merciful to me a Sinner,* Luke xviii. 13. was well received, coming from a sincere and honest Heart, as if he had made his Confession in more Words. And there is no Manner of Doubt, but that short and devout Ejaculations, frequently offered up to God, by a truly pious Soul, shall effectually prevail at the Throne of Grace, when they come from such a Person, as, by Reason of his natural Frailty and Infirmity, is not so well able to make longer Prayers.

Again : Some there are who are given to Mirth and Company-keeping ; and not knowing well how to become serious and reserved enough to be fit for the Holy Communion, therefore do not come.

I answer, That a cheerful and pleasant Disposition is so far from being unlawful, or any Way displeasing to God, that, on the contrary, where it is rightly managed, and kept within due Bounds, it is commonly very serviceable to the promoting

Peace and Love in the World, which is one of great Ends of the *Christian Religion*. Let then man but take strict Care, that his Mirth be not evil in itself, nor instrumental to promote Wickedness in the World: Let him not droll upon Religion and Piety, nor *make a mock of Sin*: Let nothing that is bitter or sarcastical, or tends to the credit or undervaluing of his Neighbour, or which is any Way profane, filthy, or obscene, come forth of his Lips, nor let him shew any manner of Delight or Satisfaction when such things are vented by others; let him abstain from debauched Songs or Stories, which seems to be contrived on Purpose to corrupt the World; and let him never promote, but always as much as can, discountenance all Manner of Rioting, unkeness, Lewdness, and Profaneness: In a word, let him be sure, that his Mirth betrays neither himself nor others, to any Thing which is contrary to Piety, Charity, or Sobriety: And as long as he keeps himself within such Bounds as these (which is plainly very possible to every Man who will heartily resolve it) he need not fear that a carefull and facetious Behaviour will render him either the worse *Christian*, or the less fit to receive the Holy Communion.

And last of all (that I may conclude what I have to say under this Head) some there are, who, having met with many Crosses and Afflictions in the world, have their Minds so discomposed, and their thoughts distracted with Care, Grief, or Trouble, that they cannot settle their Minds, as they think they ought, for the Holy Communion; and therefore they do not come to it.

To this I answer, That if any Trouble or Affliction provokes a Man to Impatience, and prevails

vails so far as to make him murmur and repine against the Providence of God; this, indeed, is Sin, and must, and may, as all other Sins, be repented of, as I have already said under the first Head of this Discourse. But if there be no more in it than this, that the Crosses and Vexations under which a Man lies, do so discompose his Mind, as that he cannot keep his Thoughts from wandering when he is at his Devotion: To this Case I have but just now spoken, and need not repeat what I have said upon it.

And thus I have at last done with the third Impediment, upon which I have been forced no longer to dwell, because of the many Scruples and Objections which it affords.

I shall need to speak but a Word or two to the fourth Impediment, which some Men pretend, namely, That having formerly received the Holy Communion, they find themselves never the better for it, and therefore think it to no Purpose to come again.

To which I answer, That if a Man reaps no Benefit from the Reception of the Holy Communion, the Fault is altogether his own, because either he does not duly prepare himself for it, or else does not receive it so often as he should. Some Bodies are so distempered, and Stomachs vitiated, that they turn the best Food into corrupt and evil Nourishment: And if a Man of the most healthy Constitution should eat but one Meal in a Week, it would never keep him in Health and Strength; but let the Stomach be cleansed, and the Body brought into good Order, and then let the Man eat his constant and daily Meals, and he shall find both his Health and Strength increased upon him. And the Case is just the same with

spiritual Food, which is exhibited to us in the Holy Sacrament. Whilst the Soul is polluted and tempered with Sins unrepented of, it will certainly either do us Hurt than Good to receive it; and when Men partake of it but once in a Year or two, it may be, not so often, whatever Strength or refreshment their Souls begin to find thereby, is lost and forgot before it comes again to be renewed by the same Ordinance. But let a Man thoroughly cleanse and purge his Soul from Sin, by a sincere Repentance, and with an honest Heart, and Mind well prepared, let him come, as often as he can, to God's Holy Table; and, by the frequent and constant Use of this Holy Sacrament, he need not doubt but he shall find himself continually to grow more and more in Grace, becoming still better, and better enabled to resist all Temptations, and daily find more and more Quiet and Comfort in his Soul and Conscience.

And thus much for the fourth Impediment.

I come now, in the last Place of all, to speak a word or two to those who are not well satisfied with the Manner of celebrating the Holy Communion in our Church, and therefore will not join with our Congregation in it.

Two Things there are, which are chiefly objected against us in this Case: One, That we make use of such Ceremonies as they cannot comply with; and, in particular, That the Holy Communion is, amongst us, to be received in the Posture of Kneeling. And the other is, that we administer the Sacrament to a mixed Congregation, without a strict Enquiry into the Qualifications of all those who are admitted

To the first of these I answer, that no Man can say, that either kneeling at the Holy Communion,

munion, or any other of the Rites and Ceremo
which we use at the Celebration of it, are si
and unlawful: because it does not appear that
has any where forbid them. The utmost,
that they can pretend, is only that they are impo
and inconvenient. Now, besides that others,
may be as good Judges, are of a different Opin
I would desire to know, whether such Thing
are not sinful, but only improper and inconven
can be a sufficient Warrant to any Man to sep
himself from the Communion of an orthodox
blished Church? If not, then they have no
Reason, upon this Account, to separate from
But if they be, then I would further dem
which is the greatest Inconvenience, to kneel
the Communion, or to make a Schism in
Church? And, of the two Inconveniences,
ther we ought not always to make Choice of
least?

To the other Objection I answer, that w
any Man openly appears to be wicked and sca
ious in his Life and Conversation, by the D
ipline of our Church, we are required to exc
such a Person from the Holy Communion, i
he gives good Evidence of his Repentance
Reformation; but where nothing outwardly
pears against a Man, who lives in the Prote
of the true Religion, what have we to do to
quire into the Secrets of his Heart, for w
he is accountable only to God? And, if
Saviour Christ did not exclude even Judas him
from the Holy Communion; because at that T
he had done nothing openly; although G
well knew that he had made a private Ag
ement with the chief Priest to betray him;
should we take upon us to be more strict in

latter? Or who has given us any Authority so
be?

And thus have I examined, and, I hope, suffi-
ciently answered, all the Pretences which Men do
ordinarily make for neglecting the holy Commu-
nion. I have but this one Thing to add, and I
have done; namely, That as it is a great Sin to re-
ceive the Holy Communion unworthily, that is to
say, without true Repentance; so certainly it is no
less a Sin, to slight and neglect that Ordinance
which Christ himself has expressly appointed and
commanded in Remembrance of that Death and
Passion which he underwent for us. Let us therefore
take the Matter into our serious Consideration;
and whilst we are so very cautious to avoid the
danger on the one Hand, let us not be so foolish
to run ourselves into as great a Hazard on the
other. For as he who presumed to come to the
Nuptial Feast, without a Wedding-Garment, was se-
verely punished for his Presumption, *Matt. xxii. 12.*
so they who neglected to come at all, and slighted
the Invitation which was given them, were ac-
counted as unworthy Persons, and received their
doom accordingly, *Ver. 7, 8.*

A brief Account of the End and Design of the Holy Communion, the Obligation to receive it, the Way to prepare for it, and the Behaviour of ourselves both at, and after it.

In a former Discourse, intituled, *An Answer to all Excuses and Pretences, which Men ordi-
narily make for their not coming to the Holy Com-
munion,* I have endeavoured to remove all those
Obstacles, whether real or pretended, which to
many

many Men seem either wholly to stop their Way to God's Holy Table, or at least to render it very difficult and troublesome to be passed. If what have therein said has had any Influence upon the Minds of well meaning Men, so as to incline them something more than formerly, to prepare themselves for the partaking of this sacred Ordinance, I hope, that what I am now about to offer, may both make them thoroughly sensible of the Obligation which lies upon them thereto, and also sufficiently instruct them in every Thing which is necessary in the Performance thereof, to render them worthy Receivers, and acceptable to Almighty God.

Five Things there are which are very necessary to be understood by every one who would be thoroughly instructed and directed, in order to the receiving of the Holy Communion: Namely, *Firstly*, For what End and Purpose this Ordinance was instituted and appointed. *Secondly*, What Obligation lies upon every *Christian* to come and receive it. *Thirdly*, How often we all of us ought to partake of it. *Fourthly*, What Preparation is necessary in order to it. And *Lastly*, How we ought to behave ourselves both at, and after it: And though I have hinted many Things in my former Discourse above-mentioned, which might in some sort serve for an Answer to these Enquiries, yet because what is there spoken, which may relate to these Particulars, is only occasionally touched upon, but just glanced at, I have thought it may not be improper a little more fully and methodically to handle them.

For the clearing of the first Point proposed, you must call to Mind what the Holy Scripture often declares to us; that our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ

Christ died for us ; that we are justified by his Blood, and saved from Wrath through him. And although we were once Enemies, are yet upon our true Repentance, reconciled to God by the Death of his Son,, Rom. v. 8, 9, 10. and thereby put into a capacity of being made eternally happy in the life to come. From whence it will follow, that ^{it is}, in the first Place, it is the Duty of every Christian always to be thankful for, and never to forget or be unmindful of, so great a Favour and benefit vouchsafed and offered to us ; so secondly, except a Man have an Interest in the Death and Resurrection of Christ, and is made a Partaker of the Merits of his Sufferings, and of that Propitiation which he thereby made for the Sins of the World, John ii. 2. he can have no just Ground to hope for everlasting Salvation. That, therefore, both these Ends might the more effectually be obtained, and that all Christians might often, in a lively manner, be put in Mind, and also, at the same time, be made Partakers of the Merits of Christ's Death and Sufferings, this sacred Ordinance was appointed by him, both as the Commemoration of his Passion, and also the Communion of his Body and Blood. Thus the Apostle Paul tells us, what three of the Evangelists have also recorded, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took Bread, and when he had given Thanks, he brake it, saying, Take, eat, this is my Body, which is broken for you : This do in Remembrance of me. After the same manner he took the Cup, when he had supped, saying, This Cup is the New Testament of my Blood, this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in Remembrance of me : For says the Apostle in the same Place} as often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's

Lord's Death till he come, 1 Cor. xi. 23, &c. And the same St. Paul tells us, in the 16th Verse of the foregoing Chapter, that the *Cup of Blessing which we bless, is the Communion of the Blood of Christ; and the Bread which we break, the Communion of the Body of Christ.* From which Passages of Scripture it is obvious to collect, why this divine Institution is ordinarily called sometimes the *Lord's Supper*, and sometimes the *Holy Communion*.

Here then, we have a full and plain Answer to the first Thing proposed to be handled, namely, *For what End and Purpose this Ordinance was instituted and appointed.* It was appointed (as we may see *First*), To put us in Remembrance of the Death and Sufferings of our Saviour *Jesus Christ*: The Breaking of the Bread being put to represent the Crucifixion of his Body; and the Wine his Blood which was shed for us: And *Secondly*, That might be to us not only the Commemoration, but also the Communion of the Body and Blood of *Christ*; that is to say, the Means which God has ordained, by the Use of which we do communicate in the Benefits of that Sacrifice which *Christ* offered and in the Merits of that Death and Passion which he underwent in his *Body*, and by the shedding of his Blood for us; as I have already said in my former Discourse.

I now come to the second Thing proposed to be enquired into, namely, What Obligation lies upon every *Christian* to come and receive the Holy Communion.

And here, in the first Place, What Obligation can be stronger than the plain and positive Command of our Saviour *Christ* himself? Which he has laid upon us in as express Terms as can be, that we should *do this*; that is to say, *Eat of this Bread,*

And drink of this Cup, in Remembrance of me, as we may find it in the Words just now cited, 1 Cor. xi. 23, &c. And that these Words were ever understood to contain in them a strict Command, perpetually binding all Christians to the Observation of it, most evidently appears, as well from the Context of that Chapter (from the twentieth Verse to the End) as from the constant practice and Concern which the Apostolic and primitive Church always shewed, in the maintaining and decent Celebration of this Ordinance.

But besides the bare Authority of our Saviour, which alone is sufficient to lay an indispensable Obligation upon us, there are some collateral Circumstances and Considerations, which do add an extraordinary Weight and Force to this Command; as, namely, that it was given at that very time, when he, who was our best Friend, and greatest Benefactor, was just ready to die, and lay down his Life for our Sakes; and not only so, but this Command was given to us to be observed in remembrance of him, and of that Death which he underwent for us.

If a dying Friend should, before his Departure out of the World, make any Request to me, which were not impossible or unreasonable in itself, I should think myself much wanting in that Friendship which I had professed to him, if I should omit or neglect to perform it. But if this Friend had been one, not of the common Sort, but a very great and extraordinary Benefactor to me; and if beyond this, he were just going to lay down his Life for my Sake; and, Lastly, if his Request were, that I would do something which might be a Means to keep me always in Remembrance of him, and of what he had done for me;

certainly I might well be accounted as one of the most barbarous and ungrateful Wretches that ever lived, if I were not very careful most punctual to observe and fulfil whatever should thus be joined and laid upon me. Now beside the Authority which our Saviour Christ has to lay an Obligation upon us; we, all of us, sure, must by knowledge, that he is our Friend, our greatest Friend and chiefest Benefactor; and that it was for our Sakes alone, that he underwent all his sufferings, and yielded up his Life upon the Cross. And since he has made this Request, and left it as Command unto all who shall believe in him, that they should eat of this Bread, and drink of this Cup in Remembrance of him, and of what he had suffered for us; I would fain know, how any Man, who calls himself a Christian, can possibly be excused from the greatest Ingratitude, as well as Disobedience, if he neglects to do what he thus appears to be so strongly and doubly obliged to? And with what Confidence can he hope to be saved by the Merits and Passion of Christ, whilst he refuses or neglects to commemorate his Death and Sufferings in that Manner, which Christ himself has appointed?

And thus, I think, we have a sufficient Answer to the second Thing proposed, namely, What Obligation lies upon every Christian to receive the Holy Communion? We are plainly obliged to do it, First, in point of Duty; because we are therunto expressly commanded by Jesus Christ our Saviour: And Secondly, in Point of Gratitude; because this Injunction was laid upon us by our best Friend, and greatest Benefactor, when he was just ready to lay down his Life for us, that it might serve as a Means to keep up in his Church a lively Remem-

remembrance of him, and of his great Love to us
of time for ever.

I proceed, then, to the third Thing proposed to
be handled, namely, how often we, all of us,
be ought to partake of the Holy Communion. The
Answer to which Question is briefly and plainly
in One, viz. That every sincere Christian is obliged to
partake of the Holy Communion as often as he has Op-
portunity for it. The Truth of which Assertion, I
think will appear, beyond all Manner of Exception,
from these two following Considerations:

First, I suppose it will easily be granted, that
whoever is an honest and sincere Christian, ought
not to slip any Opportunity that is fairly offered
of expressing his Thankfulness to Almighty
God; for that infinite Mercy, vouchsafed unto
mankind, in our Redemption, by the Death and
Resurrection of our blessed Lord and Saviour: For he
that is wanting in his Thankfulness to God for so
estimable a Benefit, thereby plainly demonstrates,
that he is not thoroughly sincere in his Christianity,
which indispensably obliges him to this Duty.
Now that the devout Participation of the Holy
Communion is one very fit and proper Way of ex-
pressing our Thanks and Acknowledgments to God
for our Redemption, by the Sufferings and Death
of Christ (for the thankful Commemoration whereof
the very Ordinance was appointed) is so very
plain, that no Man, I think, who owns the Au-
thority of the Holy Scriptures, and is not misled
by false and enthusiastic Notions, can deny, or so
much as doubt of it. From whence it must needs
follow, that he who has a fair Opportunity of re-
ceiving the Holy Communion, and yet neglects to
partake of it, is deficient in the Expression of his
Thankfulness to God; and consequently is not
suffi-

sufficiently sincere in the Christianity which he professes.

Secondly, Whoever has an Opportunity offered him of doing a good Act, and has no just Reason or Excuse for his not doing of it, is certainly bound and obliged to do it, according to the Opportunity which is so offered. Now that to participate of the Holy Communion is a good Act, have already shewn, in that I have proved it to be our Duty; and that there can be no such Thing as a just Excuse or Reasoning for not partaking of it, I have proved at large in my former Discourse; which I have fully answered all Manner of Objections of this Nature. The Consequence, then, must be, that whoever has an Opportunity of receiving the Holy Communion, and yet neglects to receive it, is most evidently guilty of a Failure in his Christian Duty.

But here, perhaps, I shall be told, That sometimes it is possible an Opportunity for receiving the Holy Communion may offer itself, when a Man is not duly prepared for it; and therefore ought not to partake of it. To which I answer, that he who is a sincere Christian ought never to be unprepared for this Holy Ordinance, which will evidently appear from what I have to say.

The Fourth Thing proposed to be handled, namely, What Preparation is necessary, in order to the receiving the Holy Communion.

Now in this Holy Ordinance (and indeed to a Solemn Act of Devotion) a two fold Preparation is necessary; *First*, a general; and, *Secondly*, a particular one. I call that a general Preparation which always ought to be making, and is not the Work of a few Hours only, but should be the main Business of every Man's own Life. And that I call

particular Preparation, which is then more especially to be made, whenever we are upon thus approaching to God, and have a particular Design coming to his Holy Table.

The general Preparation, then, which is necessary for every Man that would come with Acceptance to the Holy Communion, is Repentance for his past Sins, together with a virtuous and holy life; in all Points agreeable to the Laws of God mean to the best of his Power;) and never wilfully and habitually straying away from those Rules and Precepts, which are prescribed to us in the Gospel. For he, who having not repented of his sins, but living still in the *wilful Practice* of any them, or the *known Neglect* of any Duty, shall offer to approach unto God in any Act of Devotion whatsoever, is so far from doing a Thing which acceptable to Him, that, on the contrary, God has expressed the greatest Abhorrence that well can be, unto all such Worship or Service as this: *the Sacrifice of the wicked is un-Abomination unto the Lord,* Prov. xv. 8. And again, *He that turneth away his Ear from hearing the Law, even his prayer shall be an Abomination,* xxxviii. 9. besides a multitude of other Texts that might be quoted to the same Purpose. And here we must ever remember what the Apostle St. James tells us, Chap. ii. 10. and what in itself also is most highly rational, namely, that *Whosoever shall keep the whole Law and yet [wilfully] offend in any one Point (and continue therein without Repentance) is guilty of all:* for, (according to the Apostle's Reasoning in the next Verse) since the same God who forbids one sin, has also forbid all others; he who wilfully persists in any one Sin, whatever it be, plainly despises the very Authority of God, and thereby, as

much as in him lies, undermines the very Foundation of the whole Law.

I will not then stand to dispute how those Words of St. Paul, are to be interpreted; that *he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself*, 1 Cor. xi. 22. but this take to be as plain, both from Reason and Scripture, as such a Thing can be, that not only he who comes to the Holy Communion, but who dares to offer up his Prayers to God, while he wilfully persists in any known Sin, or the Neglect of any known Duty, is guilty of a very great Affront to the Divine Majesty. To come to the Marriage Feast without a *Wedding Garment*, was resented as a high Contempt to the King who made the Invitation, Matt. xxii. 12, 13. And to bow the Knees to Christ, and cry, *Hail King of the Jews!* at the same Time when they spit on him, and smote him on the Head, was nothing but a redoubling of their Mockery, Matt. xxvii. 29, 30. And I appeal to the common Sense of every Man, whether he is not guilty of the very same Sort of Practice toward Almighty God, who bends his Knees, or shew outward Signs of Reverence to him in Prayer, or at the Holy Communion, while his Heart and Affections are not truly bent to serve and obey him in all his Actions: But he, on the contrary, lives in an habitual Violation of his Laws, and a continual Contempt of his Power and Authority.

But besides this, which I call a general Preparation, there is also a more particular Preparation which is a very proper, and ordinarily necessary, in order to the Reception of the Holy Communion which the Apostle St. Paul tells us is *Self-Examination*: *Let a Man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup*, says he,

found, 1 Cor. xi. 28. That is, in other Terms, that whenever a Man designs to present himself at God's Holy Table, he ought, before-hand, seriously to call himself to an Account whether or no he be so qualified as to be acceptable to God when he comes there; that is to say, whether or not he really and truly has that *general Preparation* which I have been just now speaking, and which without which he ought not to come. For if perchance an Enquiry as this be not often, and carefully made, the Filth and Pollution of Sin will, by little and little, in a Manner, almost insensibly leave again to our Souls, till, by Degrees, it destroys, and takes away that *general Preparation* which ought always to be kept, and maintained in us. Whilst we sometimes *slumber* or *sleep*, our lamps will be apt to burn dim; and therefore must him new trimmed, at our going out to meet their Bridegroom, Matt. xxv. 5, 6, 7. And when we are to have put on the *Wedding-Garment*, Matt. xxii. 12. it is yet very fit that, as often as we come to the Marriage-Feast, we should examine, and take a careful View of our Dress, for fear it should have contracted some Spot or Defilement. But here, perhaps, it will be demanded, Is this all the Preparation that is necessary to the receiving of the Holy Communion; that a Man should lead a virtuous and Christian Life, and not be conscious to himself (upon the Examination of his Conscience) that he continues in any unrepented Sin? Is it not absolutely necessary, that, upon every such Occasion as this, he should run through the whole Catalogue of Sins, and examine himself particularly upon every one of them, with all their Circumstances and Aggravations? And ought not he,

he also, for some Days before-hand, to sequester himself from all worldly Business whatsoever, and to spend his Time only in Prayer, Meditation, Reading, and such like Acts of Devotion?

That honest and lawful Business is never to be reckoned as an Hindrance from the Holy Communion, I have shewn in a former Discourse. And to the rest of what is here urged, I answer, That such a strict and particular Examination of our Conscience is undoubtedly sometimes the Duty of every Man: For except we thus *search and try our Ways*, that we may clearly discern wherein we have gone astray, we shall not be able to *turn again to the Lord*, as we ought to do, *Lam. iii. 40.* Nor do I think, that any Time can be more proper and convenient for this, than when we are about to approach unto God's Table; that some suitable Prayers, and proper Meditations also, ought to be used upon such an Occasion as this (as indeed upon every particular Occasion whatsoever, that is of any considerable Moment) every Man's own Reason must tell him, is a Part of his *Christian Duty*. But that every Time he receives the Holy Communion he should thus nicely examine himself, if there be not some other particular Reason for it; and that so much Time extraordinary should always before-hand be spent in Prayer and Meditation, more than at other Seasons, is what I can find no Argument, either from Reason or Scripture, to prove necessary. It is beyond Dispute that the primitive *Christians* did every Lord's Day (if not oftener) receive the Holy Communion; and if they had thought themselves obliged to spend so much Time always in particular Preparation, as some Men seem to think necessary, it would scarce have been pos-

questionable for them to have had sufficient Leisure from their Devotions, to have followed the Business of their Callings, to get a Livelihood for themselves and their Families. And these extraordinary long Exercises of Prayer, Reading, and Meditation, which some do require, by Way of Preparation to his Ordinance; as they do affright and keep away many from it, who find that they are not well able to go through with them, so is the Performance of them such a tiresome Thing to others, that it often makes them heavy, and unapt even for their ordinary Devotions, for some Time after they have received the Holy Communion. And therefore, for the Reader's better Satisfaction and Direction, I have, at the End of this Discourse, set down a few short Rules how we ought always to prepare ourselves for the receiving of it.

I come now to the last Thing proposed to be touched on, namely, how we ought to behave ourselves both at, and after the Holy Communion; in which the very Nature and Design of the Ordinance itself will be a most plain and clear Direction to us. For since the Intent of it is not only a solemn and perpetual Commemoration of the Death of Christ, but also the Communion or Participation of the Merits of his Passion (as I have already shewn) it will follow, *First*, That at this Office we ought to behave ourselves with a suitable Seriousness, Attention and Reverence. And, *Secondly*, That after it we ought to return most humble Thanks to Almighty God, for the great Benefits which he is pleased to vouchsafe unto us by it. For our more particular Direction wherein, I have to this Discourse subjoined some short Rules, Prayers, and Meditations, which I take to be proper to the Occasion, and, I hope, may

may prove useful to those of an ordinary Capacity for whom this small Work is chiefly designed; which therefore I refer the reader, without adding here any more upon this Point.

Brief Rules for Preparation for the Holy Communion, and Behaviour both at and after it with short Prayers and Meditations suitable to that Occasion.

Of general Preparation.

HE that would maintain and keep himself in a constant general Preparation for the Holy Communion, so as always to be fit, upon the shortest Notice, to partake of it (which certainly every Christian ought ever to endeavour after) must be careful in the Observation of these following Rules

1. He must be diligent in his Endeavours to know and understand all the several Parts and Branches of his Duty to God, to all other Men and to himself; for which End he must be careful to make the best Use he can of all those Means of Instruction and Knowledge which God has put into his power; such as reading the Holy Scriptures, and other good Books, or hearing them read; attending upon the public Offices of Preaching, Catechizing, and the like, *Prov. iv. 5. John v. 39. 2 Tim. iii. 15. John xiii. 17.*

2. He must, upon all Occasions, be industrious and zealous in the avoiding of every Sin, and the Practice and Performance of every Duty, according to his Ability and Opportunity for the same, *Tit. ii. 11—14. Matt. vii. 47. Luke xii. 47.*

3. He must very often think and meditate upon his Ways, and all his particular Practices, and ex-

amine

for not coming to the Sacrament.

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line whether or no they are agreeable to the Rules
of his Duty; that wheresoever he finds he has been
ficient or done amiss, he may take the better Care
to rectify and amend it for the time to come, *Psal.*
4. and *cxix.* 59. *Lam.* iii. 40.

For which End and Purpose I recommend this
following easy, but very profitable Task, which I
would have every Man constantly to impose upon
himself; namely, two or three Times in the Course
of each Day, to carry his Thoughts back, and seri-
ously consider what he has that Day been doing,
and how he has spent his Time, from the very Mi-
nute that he first awakened from Sleep. As for
example: When first I awakened, did I think upon
any evil, and recommend myself to his Almighty Care
and Protection; or did not worldly, or it may be
unprofitable Thoughts, first take Possession of my Heart?
Again, I was lately in such and such Company;
were all my Words and Actions innocent, modest,
and decent? Did I give no Offence to God, or
scandal to the World, by any Thing which there
I either said or did? &c. Such Questions as these,
we would constantly and seriously put Home to
our Consciences, while Things remain *fresh in our
memories*, it is evident what a mighty Influence it
would have upon us, to restrain us from Evil, and
excite us to do that which is good.

Of particular Preparation.

I. Whenever Notice is given of the Celebration
of the Holy Communion, let every sincere and de-
vout Christian immediately resolve, by no means to
miss that Opportunity of commemorating the Suf-
ferings, and communicating in the Merits of his
Blessed Lord and Saviour.

II. And:

II. And in the Midst of all his Business (in the mean Time) let him very often call to Mind, that such a Day he must not be absent from God's Holy Table, and therefore must be very careful not to do any Thing which may render him unfit for it.

III. At some Seasons it is very necessary that every Man should set a little Time apart for the more strict and particular Examination of his Conscience; for which End and Purpose I earnestly recommend that Catalogue of Sins which is drawn up at the End of that Excellent Book, *The Whole Duty of Man*, which I would have every Man very distinctly to go over; and upon every Particular to recollect his Actions, and ask his Conscience, *Has he been guilty of this?*

IV. But where a Man very often receives the Communion, and never misses any Opportunity for it, I do not conceive that such a particular Examination is every Time absolutely necessary; nor have all Men, at all Times, Leisure enough for it. But however, ordinarily, I think no Man ought to receive the Holy Communion without some previous Examination of himself. For the more easy and regular Performance of which, I would have it remembered, that the whole Duty of a Christian is reducible to these three Heads, *Matt. xxii. 37, &c.*

1. To love God in the highest Degree.
2. Sincerely (and not corruptly or sensually) to love himself.

3. To love every Man with the same Sort of Love (though not in the same Degree) as he loves himself.

V. Every Time then, that a Man receives the Holy Communion, I would have him before-hand seriously to put at least these three Questions home to his Conscience:

1. Do I really and truly love God above all Things? And do I effectually shew this my Love, by a due Honour and Respect to him, in all my Thoughts, Words, and Actions?
2. Have I a sincere and upright Love for myself? That is, do I love my Soul better than my Body? And am I more heartily concerned to secure my everlasting Happiness in the World to come, than to compass my Pleasure or Profit in this Life?
3. Have I real and sincere Love for all Mankind without Exception? And do I effectually shew this my Love, by hurting no Man by Word or Deed (where I can possibly avoid it) and by being ready to do Good to every Man whatsoever, in all Ways, and upon all Occasions wherever I have Ability and Opportunity?

And if these three Questions are but seriously meditated upon for a little Time, there is scarce any man that a Man has been guilty of, but they will point it out to him.

VI. When a Man, by the Examination of his Conscience, has set his Sins full in his View, then let him insert, in his ordinary Devotions, this, or some such like Confession of them, to God:

Most gracious God! I, thy unworthy Creature, here humbly acknowledge my Sins before thee. And, besides those which I have now recollect'd, I do not but own, that I lie under the Guilt of many former Transgressions, although I am not able to recount them. Nor can I deny, but that I have committed many Sins, even contrary to the Motions of thy Grace, and the Light and Conviction of my Conscience; and therefore do most justly deserve the Severity of thy Wrath and Indignation against me.

me. But, Lord, I fly unto thee for Mercy; for Sake of Christ Jesus our blessed Redemeer, be merciful unto me in the Pardon of all my Sins, known and unknown; and so guide and assist me by thy Grace, that, for the Time to come, I may be a careful to abstain from every evil Thing, may grow in Grace, and be zealous of good Works, and maintain a Conscient vnde of Offence towards God, and towards Men, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

To which let him add this short Prayer.

MOST merciful God, who hast given thine own Son Jesus Christ to die for our Sins: Grant thy Grace, I humbly beseech thee, that I may never be unmindful, but always truly thankful for that inestimable Benefit vouchsafed unto me by his Death and Sufferings; and so fit and prepare me, O Lord, the Assistance of thy Holy Spirit, that both at this, and all other Times, I may be rightly qualified to commemorate the Passion of my blessed Redeemer, in that blessed Ordinance which he has appointed; and also there effectually to partake of that Redemption which he hath wrought for all Mankind, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Of Behaviour at, and after the Holy Communion.

1. At the Holy Communion, and at all other Times in the Worship of God, let every Man strive as much as he can, to keep his Mind intent and fixed upon what he is about, and to lay aside not only all wicked Thoughts, but also all such as are impertinent to the present Business.

2. Let him also take Care to behave himself with such outward Decency and Composedness, as may be a sufficient Token of that inward Devotion and Reverence which he bears in his Heart, without

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ing about, or any Way unnecessarily moving his Body, or whispering to any one that is near him, or like.

3. Whilst the Service is performing, let him all along join with the Minister and Congregation; with Heart and Thoughts lifted up to God; and with his Tongue too, where the Liturgy requires any Thing should be spoke aloud by the People; in the Responses, the Confession, the Lord's Prayer, and the Doxology.

4. But let him take Care, likewise, to avoid all manner of Affectation, and not to behave himself such a Manner, as if he had a Mind to be taken notice of for a Person of extraordinary Devotion. For which Reason, whatever private Prayers, or Meditations, he may have to offer up to God, let him put them into his Thoughts alone, and let not his Voice be heard, but when the public Office requires it.

5. When he has received the Bread, let him offer this, or some other short Ejaculation, to God: *O Good God! grant that by the Sufferings of my dear Saviour, who was crucified for me, I may escape eternal Sufferings, and be made Partaker of everlasting Glory.*

And when he has received the Cup, let him in Heart thus say:

O gracious God! grant that, by the shedding of the blood of thy dear Son, I may obtain the Remission of my Sins.

6. While the Bread and Wine are distributing the Rest of the Congregation, let him entertain himself with such Sort of Meditations and Prayers as these:

I. Let him again bethink himself what those sins are, to which he has been most inclined; and let

let him in the Presence of God, seriously and steadfastly renew his Resolution of being careful to abstain from them for the Time to come.

2. Let him also consider, what Opportunities ordinarily has for the doing of any good Work, and let him steadfastly purpose ever hereafter to be diligent in making use of them.

3. And let him hereunto add the following short Prayer :

Merciful God, assist me with thy Grace and thy Spirit, that I may always keep those Vows and good Resolutions which thou hast enabled me to make; that I may never return to any of my former Sins, but ever hereafter serve thee faithfully, in the constant Practice of Virtue and Religion, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

4. And here let him express his Charity, putting up a Prayer for all Mankind, in this or some like Form :

LORD, if it be thy gracious Will, extend thy Mercy and Compassion unto all Mankind. Enlighten the Minds of those that are ignorant, and move the Will of those that are obstinate, that they may all receive the holy Truth, and carefully live in the Practice of Pardon all my Enemies, O Lord, and bring them, and all of us, all the World over, to true repentance, that we may all live holily and righteously here, and in the End, be happy with thee hereafter, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

5. And then let him entertain himself with reading and meditating upon some select Portions of the Holy Scripture, until such Time as the Minister is ready to proceed with the public Office. I need not here transcribe any particular Text, but will leave every Man to make Choice of such as are most agreeable to him; only if he be at

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and to abstain from all Profane and Irregular Entertainment, let him read the Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm, where he will easily find proper Matter enough to employ his devoutest Thoughts upon this Occasion.

6. When the Service is ended, and the Congregation dismissed, let him depart to his Home, or Place of Abode; and as soon as he has a convenient Opportunity of retiring into some private Place, let him first look back, and consider whether or no, in the Performance of this Holy Office, which he has so lately been at, he has behaved himself in all Things as he ought to have done; and if he finds that he has been any Way short or defective herein, let him resolve to take a better Care for the time to come.

7. And then let him conclude with this, or the like Prayer:

*LORD I desire to return my most humble and hearty
Thanks to thee, for all thy Blessings, both spiritual
and temporal, which Thou hast vouchsafed to me. At
this Time particularly, I praise and bless thy holy Name,
for that Opportunity which thou hast this Day given
me of commemorating the Death and Passion of my
Blessed Redeemer, and also of partaking of his Merits
in the Participation of that holy Ordinance which he
has appointed. Lord, pardon all the Weaknesses and
Defects which I have been guilty of in the Performance
of that great Duty; and assist me with thy Grace, I
beseech thee, that in the whole Course of my Life I may
be ever careful to fulfil and perform those Vows and
Resolutions which I have made to thee, through Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.*

8. And last of all, let him never, as long as he lives, be forgetful of what he has thought, and said, and done, both before, and at the Holy Communion: But let the Remembrance of it be a constant Restraint

Restraint upon him from all Manner of Wickedness ; and let him upon the Assault of any Temptation, thus bethink himself :

At such a Time I received the Holy Communion and then I seriously resolved, and solemnly promised to Almighty God, that I would heartily endeavour, in all Points, to live like a Christian. Shall I then, upon an Account, cheat, lie, curse, swear, talk profanely or obscenely, or the like? No, God forbid! I have engaged myself to God, to be another Sort of a Man; and what can I expect but Wrath and Indignation from him, if knowingly and wilfully I should violate those Promises which I so deliberately and stedfastly made to him?

THE END.



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